Shifting Focus: Later Academic Life

By Dr. Roger Baldwin

Over the past few decades, several higher education scholars, including myself, have focused attention on academic life, its challenges, satisfactions, and the evolution as a professor gains experience, builds expertise, and matures. Most of this attention has focused on early academic life—the professional socialization process in graduate school and the early career phase when a professor lays the foundation for a successful career. Many institutions, MSU among them, have used research on the early academic career to prepare graduate assistants as teachers, orient newly hired professors, and offer professional development support through workshops and consultations.

The later years of the academic career have received much less attention, even though any seasoned professor knows that the nature of academic work and the professional support needs of professors change over time. The widespread assumption is that an experienced professor knows how the system works and can manage his or her own career development. The prevailing logic is that higher education institutions need to invest limited resources where they will pay the biggest dividend—early-career professors.

This logic, while compelling, ignores the challenges long-serving professors encounter when, for example, academic fields evolve, funding sources dry up, and students change considerably. It also overlooks the natural flow of academic life when priorities may change from building a reputation or finding a break-through to mentoring the next generation or leaving a legacy. Lack of attention to later academic life also ignores inevitable questions about life as an emeritus academic.

This spring, a symposium co-sponsored by the Erickson Distinguished Chair in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education, WorkLife Office, and Academic Advancement Network will focus attention on the later years of the academic career. The purpose of the symposium is to reimagine later academic life in the context of Michigan State University. Our goal is to identify strategies to support senior and retired faculty members and administrators and utilize their professional experience, skills, and wisdom more effectively. Participants will consider innovative approaches MSU can employ to make the later academic career a thoughtfully-planned, productive, and fulfilling stage of professional life—a stage that benefits the university community as well as the individual.

Taking the “Taboo” Out of Retirement: Reimagining Later Academic Life is scheduled for Wednesday, March 22, 2017 from 8:00AM to 4:00PM at the James B. Henry Center. All members of the MSU community are welcome. Register online at http://fod.msu.edu/events/taking-taboo-out-retirement-reimagining-later-academic-life or call Jill Bryant at (517) 355-7483.
Academic leaders, faculty and academic staff, human resources professionals, and students who are interested in issues regarding late careers are invited to participate in a one-day symposium, “Taking the ‘Taboo’ out of Retirement: Reimagining Later Academic Life.” Our goal is to collectively identify strategies to support senior and retired academics and administrators and utilize more effectively their experience, skills, and wisdom. Continental breakfast and lunch will be provided. The symposium is free.

At this symposium, we will:

- Review forces shaping issues in later academic life on university campuses.
- Introduce model programs and policies of peer institutions.
- Consider innovative approaches for MSU to enhance the later academic career as a thoughtfully-planned, productive, and fulfilling stage of professional life, benefitting the university community as well as the individual.

Registration may be found online at http://fod.msu.edu/events/taking-taboo-out-retirement-reimagining-later-academic-life, or by calling Jill Bryant at (517) 355-7483.

This symposium is framed by the research and collaborations of Professor Roger Baldwin, the Dr. Mildred B. Erickson Distinguished Chair in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education.

Please join us for this special event, co-sponsored by the

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WorkLife Office Social Media & Events Calendar

You can stay up to date on all of the WorkLife Office Initiatives on our website and social media accounts. For a complete listing of upcoming WorkLife events, visit our website: https://worklife.msu.edu. Interested in receiving weekly e-mails about upcoming programs and events? Join the WorkLife Listserv, by sending an e-mail with the subject line “WorkLife Listserv” to: worklife@msu.edu. Be sure to indicate your name and e-mail address. While you’re at it, be sure to follow us on social media!

Flexibility Workshops

**Flex for U: Tools to Implement Flex for Supervisors**

**Thursday, March 16, 2017**

3:00PM—5:00PM

Linton Hall, Room 113

In this interactive session, participants will discuss and learn more about issues related to workplace flexibility, with tips to implement flexible work arrangements in your unit from a supervisor’s perspective. Positive leadership ideas will be shared to help create and support a culture of flexibility to enhance productivity and positive morale in the workplace.

Presenter: Lori Strom, MSU WorkLife Office, Lifespan and Family Services Coordinator

RSVP by email to worklife@msu.edu (subject line: Flex for U) or by phone (517) 353-1635.

**Identifying Your Career Brand**

**Wednesday, March 15, 2017**

8:30AM—10:00AM, Chittenden Hall, Rm 110

Learn strategies and be empowered to effectively leverage your brand in the workplace without compromising who you are. Presenter: Yolanda Moore, former WNBA basketball player and college level women’s basketball head coach.

RSVP for this event by emailing worklife@msu.edu or calling (517) 353-1635. Events are free and open to all.
Interview with Dean Sherman Garnett

Michigan State University employs thousands of people in a wide variety of work models. Management at the Dean level involves the supervision of both faculty and staff positions. Lydia Weiss from the WorkLife Office sat down with 2016 Outstanding Supervisor Award recipient, Dean Sherman Garnett, to learn more about how he manages the team at James Madison College.

When asked about the staff and faculty that he manages, Dean Garnett was quick to acknowledge that, relatively speaking, his team is smaller than most colleges at MSU. “We’re cool because we are small,” he said. Although the number of faculty (approximately 42 tenure-stream faculty) and academic staff (approximately 13 people) is small, Dean Garnett has a very intentional model for accommodating the needs of employees within the college, which includes flexible work arrangements when needed.

Dean Garnett, first and foremost, explained that the team itself is incredibly important. “We try to be a long-term community. We try to hire people who want to be part of the mission and engage with students. Hiring is really important, whether it’s a faculty position or someone on the staff,” he said. “You try to hire people who will build their job and will communicate with you and you can communicate with them, but also who will take the job over. The college wouldn’t be as successful if I was into micro-managing everything that goes on here.”

As for faculty flexibility, it’s not quite the same as someone who works 8:00AM-5:00PM, but there are still flexibility needs for this group of MSU employees. Dean Garnett explained that some faculty might prefer going to the library to work at 10:00PM, while another might prefer getting up at 6:00AM and working at home, so this type of flexibility is built-in. However, if a faculty person has a medical issue, or an elderly parent they must care for, among other issues, there are ways of accommodating their schedules accordingly. “It’s still the case that I want the job done. So if someone has a sick child or something like that, we don’t want to make them feel like they can’t go take care of their family,” he said.

Dean Garnett summarized it this way, “If I thought I had a staff who was trying to steal 10 minutes from me, then I did a bad job in hiring and I don’t trust them and I don’t want to work in that environment. I think we just try to handle things in a civilized way and then we try to respond to any serious family or health issue with the notion that they are long-term employees and so one has to try to overcome any inconvenience about the near-term problem. Why would I want to make it feel like something that is beyond [an employee’s] control is [their] fault or that [they] are not living up to the job? But there are limits. If someone has to be here every day doing x, the fact that they can’t be here every day—that’s a problem. But in the whole flow of it—you hire faculty for 40 years, you’d like them to feel like this is a good career.”

Dean Garnett discussed many different types of circumstances that might cause the need for flexibility and emphasized that the context should determine what kind of flexibility arrangement is developed. He said, “It’s based on human beings doing the best they can and being dedicated.” Flexibility goes beyond simply shifting hours of work. It involves creating an environment that is supportive and encourages innovative ideas and creative adjustments.

“I want to be a good dean, but I am not the teacher-in-chief; I am not the researcher-in-chief. I think that is being driven by faculty themselves and the high standards of the university and the ones that the college sets for itself. We give people the opportunity to self-correct and set their own standard and then hold them to their own plan, provided that plan makes sense,” he said.

Dean Garnett’s advice to staff/faculty considering flex:

“Is this a long-term thing or a short-term thing? Think about what you contribute to the place and how you could still make that contribution but in a more flexible way. And then also be open to a dialogue because there may be other ways to do this...be creative about the problem and also about what might be a solution. Be open to what the supervisor says, as long as they are creative about it.”

Dean Garnett’s advice for supervisors:

“It’s the workplace of the future. You can’t pretend that people aren’t married, have children, or have complicated lives. You have to acknowledge that these issues affect the workplace.” He also recommends recognizing the contributions of everyone and to value everyone’s opinions. He said that the bottom line is that you “have to want that kind of environment.”

“Flexibility is for a high producing environment that has great outcomes—we should care about those outcomes and should care about the people who are producing those outcomes. You should treat everyone with dignity and some flexibility,” he said. Dean Garnett has witnessed that what started as a modest research base has evolved into a robust research base and he gives some credit to the positive and flexible work environment of the college.
MARCH 2017

Calendar of Events @ a Glance

For a full listing of events with details and RSVP information, visit https://worklife.msu.edu.

March 7, 14, 21 & 28
12:00PM—1:00PM: Breastfeeding Series. Week 1: Introduction to Breastfeeding Benefits; Week 2: Baby is Here!; Week 3: Maintaining Breastfeeding; Week 4: Breastfeeding Transitions. Linton Hall, Room 113 (479 West Circle Drive).

March 14
3:30PM—5:00PM: Cultivating Change @ MSU: Academic Women’s Forum. MSU Main Library, Green Room (W-444).

March 15
8:30AM—10:00AM: Identifying Your Career Brand: Women’s Networking Association. Chittenden Hall, Room 110 (466 West Circle Drive).

March 16
12:00PM—1:00PM: Heart Smart & CPR Ready. Linton Hall, Room 113 (479 West Circle Drive).

3:00PM—5:00PM: Flex for U: Tools to Implement Flex for Supervisors. Linton Hall, Room 113 (479 West Circle Drive).

March 21
12:00PM—1:30PM (check-in at 11:45AM): Start to Finish: The early career woman’s guide to financial wisdom. MSU Union, Lake Huron Room (49 Abbot Road). Co-sponsored by TIAA, MSU Human Resources, Women's Advisory Committee for Support Staff and WorkLife Office.

March 22
8:00AM—4:00PM: Taking the “Taboo” Out of Retirement: Reimagining Later Academic Life. James B. Henry Center (3535 Forest Road, Lansing, MI). Co-sponsored by Academic Advancement Network and WorkLife Office.

9:00AM—10:00AM (check-in at 8:45AM) OR 12:00PM—1:00PM (check-in at 11:45AM): Halfway There: A retirement checkup. MSU Union, Lake Huron Room (49 Abbot Road). Co-sponsored by TIAA, MSU Human Resources, Women’s Advisory Committee for Support Staff and WorkLife Office.

For a full listing of events with details and RSVP information, visit https://worklife.msu.edu.


Cultivating Change @ MSU

Tuesday, March 14, 2017
3:30PM-5:00PM

MSU Main Library, Green Room-W444

Looking for help with:
- Eldercare
- Pet care
- Childcare
- Home maintenance

As a Michigan State University staff or faculty member, you have free access to services provided by Care.com. Visit www.care.com/msu to sign-up with your MSU NETID today!

95% of MSU users would recommend Care.com to their colleagues.
Breastfeeding Series

Time: 12:00PM—1:00PM
Location: Linton Hall, Room 113 (479 West Circle Drive)
Presenter: Mary Machowicz, RN, Expectant Parents Organization

Although breastfeeding is natural, it is a learned skill. This four-part program is designed to give pregnant women and their partners information on preparing to breastfeed and strategies for continuing to breastfeed upon returning to work.

Week 1 (Tuesday, March 7): Introduction to Breastfeeding: Benefits, How Breastfeeding Works

Week 2 (Tuesday, March 14): Baby is Here! Getting Started: The mechanics of Breastfeeding Positioning, Latching On, Feeding Patterns, Challenges

Week 3 (Tuesday, March 21): Maintaining Breastfeeding: Lifestyle, Expressing and Storing Milk, Returning to Work


To register, call the WorkLife Office at (517) 353-1635 or email worklife@msu.edu.